At the turn of the century, 40 million acres of forest burned each year.

Rebirth of the American Land

Early Challenge—Fire Protection. The first challenge to national forest and national grassland managers was the protection of forests and grasslands from fire. The fire organization developed for this purpose in cooperation with the States and other Federal agencies has reduced the acreage burned each year in the United States from 40 to 3 million acres.

Restoring Watershed and Grazing Lands. With the transfer of the national forests to the Department of Agriculture's newly formed Forest Service in 1905, attention was also given to mapping these lands, managing grazing use to protect watersheds, and developing a transportation system. Lands that had been abused by timbering, cropping, and grazing and then abandoned were purchased under authority granted by the Weeks Act and restored to productivity. In cooperation with the States, the reintroduction of deer, elk, and turkey in areas where they had not been seen for generations and the restoration of overgrazed mountain watersheds were early successes.

A Great American Treasure

Increasing demands have been placed on the National Forest System as our population and its expectations and needs grow. We are dependent as never before on these national forests and national grasslands for wildlife and plant habitat, watershed protection, recreation, wilderness and wild and scenic rivers, minerals, forage, and timber. The System contains 80 percent of the country's habitat for elk, mountain goat, and bighorn sheep, more than half of the salmon and steelhead spawning and rearing habitat in the lower 48 States, and over 200 threatened and endangered plant and animal species. It receives more recreation visitors than any other public land area, contains 47 percent of the softwood timber in the country, and holds important deposits of platinum, copper, silver, lead, and molybdenum. This vast acreage also supports America's image of itself as a land of open spaces and spectacular scenery and contributes to the health of the global environment. The National Forest System is truly America's Great Outdoors.

Early rangers, equipped with map and compass, inventoried resources, marked boundaries, or located fires.

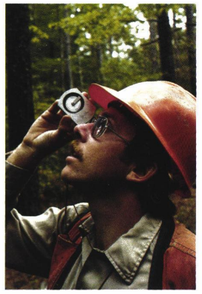
America's Future

A Call for Change. Renewable natural resources will always be important to the economic welfare and quality of life for the people of this country. How we manage these resources wisely for many demands is a dynamic process—one that requires continual adjustment in response to our needs, values, and understanding.

From our century of experience, we know our natural resources are resilient, renewable, and responsive to careful management. This centennial celebration is a marking point: 100 years of conservation resource management and the setting of our sights for the next 100. Those sights are now aimed toward a more environmentally sensitive commodity production and the enhancement of recreation, wildlife, and fisheries resources.

DAVID MUENCH

Tidal estuary at Cedar Point on the Croatan National Forest in North Carolina.



Research holds the key to a sustainable supply of natural resources.

The Global Community. The importance of our natural resources to our well-being and the health of the global environment is growing. Just how well we respond to pressures on our global environment depends on an improved understanding through research, international cooperation, and the collective talents of us all.

Join the Celebration. Join the USDA Forest Service during 1991 in celebrating the existence of your National Forest System and conservation. For more information about your national forests or the National Forest System centennial celebration, write or call the national forest or the regional office nearest you or the office in Washington, DC.

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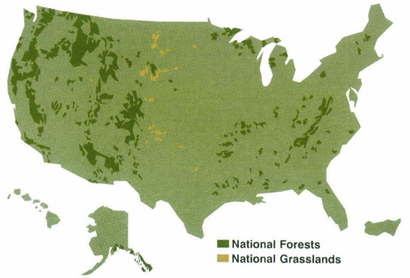

The National Forest System.

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Celebrate National Forests 1891-1991

100 Years of Conservation

NATIONAL FORESTS 1891-1991

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Department of Agriculture
Forest Service

R. THOMAS

Birches, maples, and cherries of Vermont's Green Mountains wrap a New England village in autumn color.

The National Forest System

Forests, Grasslands, and Experimental Forests. The Green Mountain National Forest of Vermont with its brilliant fall colors. The Gifford Pinchot National Forest of Washington—site of the explosive volcano, Mount St. Helens. The Caribbean National Forest of Puerto Rico—tropical home of immense biological diversity. The Angeles and San Bernardino National Forests—getaways to open space for millions of southern Californians. The Tongass National Forest—coastal rain forest penetrated by the spectacular Alaskan Inside Passage. The National Forests of Texas—fast-growing pine forests helping meet America's need for wood products. The Little Missouri National Grassland of North Dakota—a living library of native grasses, habitat for gamebirds, and grazing area for livestock and deer. The renowned watershed research on the Cowetta Experimental Forest of North Carolina—source of answers for America's future. The White River National Forest of Colorado—host of world-class alpine skiing and important watershed in the West. The Chattahoochee National Forest of Georgia—a hunter's paradise. These are a few of the 156 national forests, 19 national grasslands, and 71 experimental forests of the 191-million-acre National Forest System.

These Lands Belong to the People. National Forest System lands, starting 100 years ago, have been reserved for the American people. We all enjoy the resources of these lands: water, scenery, outdoor recreation, wildlife, wilderness, timber, forage, minerals, and historic and prehistoric sites. To safeguard these natural resources for all Americans, now and in the future, the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service cares for this great American treasure.

R. THOMAS

The Maroon Bells on the White River National Forest in Colorado reflected in Maroon Lake.

Beginnings

A Year To Remember—1891. The year 1891 is an important year for Americans and the conservation-minded everywhere. That year marked the beginning of the National Forest System—lands protected and wisely used. These lands are the physical embodiment of an important idea—conservation. On March 30, 1891, President Benjamin Harrison, under the authority granted in the Forest Reserve Act, reserved the Yellowstone Park Timber Land Reserve (now part of the Shoshone and the Teton National Forests) for the public. With this action, he took an important first step in conservation of America's natural resources.

DAVID MUENCH

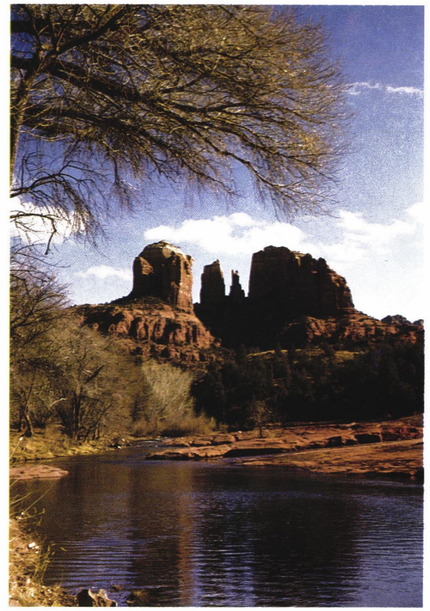
Aspen and spruce on the Coconino National Forest in Arizona.

JIM HUGHES

Mount St. Helens, active volcano, on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest in Washington.

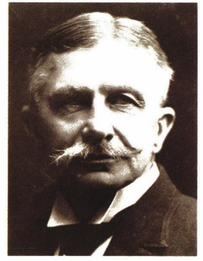
Turning Away From Resource Abuse. Until the late 19th century, Federal land policy was to dispose of public lands in an effort to promote settlement and raise revenue. Americans widely perceived their abundant resources to be unlimited. The Nation's vast timberlands, however, were being wasted, grazing lands abused, and watersheds destroyed. Many thought this was a necessary part of development—that strategies not exploiting the resources ran counter to economic progress.

Farsighted Conservation Leaders. Beginning in the 1860's, visionaries such as John Wesley Powell, explorer and early director of the U.S. Geological Survey, Bernhard Fernow, Gifford Pinchot, and Theodore Roosevelt saw the folly of this abuse and advocated the concept of conserving our natural resources, retaining land in public ownership, and managing it for the common good over the long term. In the years between 1891 and 1908, in spite of extreme opposition from special interests, most of the national forests were established. As President, Theodore Roosevelt with his Forest Service friend, Chief Gifford Pinchot, served as champions of the national forest idea by reserving most of the land now in the National Forest System. By 1911, the wisdom of what had been done was recognized when the Weeks Act was passed, permitting the Federal Government to buy back lands in the East to form national forests, primarily to protect the watersheds of navigable rivers and streams.

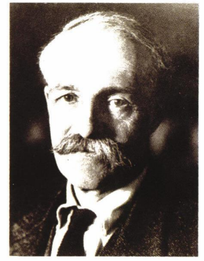


ROBERT SZAKO

Cathedral rocks at Red Rock Crossing on the Coconino National Forest in Arizona.



Bernhard E. Fernow, America's first professional forester and energetic promoter of the national forest idea.



Gifford Pinchot, spirited conservation leader and first chief of the USDA Forest Service.